

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5601

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 4705

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PING CB

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HIGH POLITICAL
COUNCIL

REF: A. PHNOM PENH 4679

B. FBIS BANGKOK K 311420

1. PRESIDENT LON NOL ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT (MARCH 31)
THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL (REF B).
HE EXPLAINED THAT THE COUNCIL WAS CREATED AT THE TIME
PARILAMENT GRANTED THE PRESIDENT SPECIAL POWERS AND
THAT PARLIAMENT'S RESUMPTION OF ITS NORMAL DUTIES
CONDEQUENTLY OBVIATES THE NEED FOR SUCH AN ORGAN.

2. IN FACT, THE COUNCIL WAS ABOLISHED IN ORDER TO
PAVE THE WAY FOR THE CREATION OF A NEW EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL CONSISTING OF THE PRESIDENT, FORMER HIGH
POLITICAL COUNCIL MEMBER SIRIK MATAK, PRIME MINSTER
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LONG BORET, AND FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MG SOSTHENE

FERNANDEZ. DECREES CREATING THIS BODY AND APPOINTING SIRIK MATAK HIGH ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT WILL BE PUBLISHED WITHIN TWO OR THREE DAYS, THE PRIME MINISTER TELLS US. THE PUBLIC RATIONALE GIVEN FOR THE COUNCIL'S DISSOLUTION AND THE DELAY IN ESTABLISHING THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WERE DESIGNED TO LESSEN THE POLITICAL BLOW TO THE FORMER COUNCIL'S VICE CHAIRMAN, CHENG HENG, WHO IS NOW EXCLUDED FROM THE HIGH POLICY LEVELS.

3. WE BELIEVE THE DECISION TO DISSOLVE THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL IS SOUND.

(A) JUSTIFIABLE SUSPICIONS THAT CHENG HENG WAS ASSOCIATED WITH FORMER PRIME MINISTER SON SANN'S ILL-ADVISED PEACE PROPOSALS HAD EFFECTIVELY ELIMINATED WHATEVER TRUST THE PRESIDENT AND SIRAK MATAK HAD PLACED IN HIM AND PREVENTED THE COUNCIL FROM FORTHRIGHTLY ADDRESSING IMPORTANT ISSUES.

(B) ALTHOUGH CHENG HENG OBVIOUSLY WILL NOT GO QUIETLY (REF B), HE DOES NOT HAVE THE PERSONAL STATURE OR FOLLOWING TO CAUSE SERIOUS POLITICAL TURBULENCE. THE RESIGNATIONS OF THE MINISTERS OF JUSTICE, HEALTH AND INDUSTRY, WHO WERE CHENG HENG'S APPOINTEES TO THE CABINET, WAS ENTIRELY EXPECTED AND SHOULD, IF ANYTHING, PERMIT STRENGTHENING OF THE GOVERNMENT.

(C) ON THE MINUS SIDE OF THE LEDGER, THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL COULD EXACERBATE PROBLEMS WITH PARLIAMENT. WHILE SIRIK MATAK MAY NOT RESENT THE PRESIDENT'S RESUMPTION OF ITS POWERS (AS LONG BORET HAS ASSURED US HE WOULD NOT), ANY MOVE BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND SENATE LEADERSHIPS TO PUT THESE WORDS INTO ACTION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DRAW A REACTION FROM SIRIK MATAK AND THE REPUBLICANS.

4. THE NEW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL SHOULD BE A DECIDED IMPROVEMENT OVER THE POLITICAL COUNCIL. THE TALENTS OF SIRIK MATAK, WHO IS TO PREPARE THE AGENDA FOR THE COUNCIL'S WEEKLY MEETINGS, WILL BE MUCH BETTER UTILIZED. MORE IMPORTANT PERHAPS, THE INCLUSION OF

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LONG BORET AND SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ WILL PERMIT THE PRINCIPAL EXECUTORS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY TO PARTICIPATE MORE EFFECTIVELY IN ITS FORMULATION. THESE ADDITIONS TO THE GKR'S HIGHEST POLICY-MAKING LEVEL WILL, WE BELIEVE, MORE THAN COMPENSATE FOR THE RELATIVELY MINOR DAMAGE CHENG HENG'S DEPARTURE WILL DO TO THE GOVERNMENT'S IMAGE AS A BROAD-BASED COALITION.

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